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SIKHS AS LIBERATORS

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Published By :
Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,
AMRITSAR.

Price 1—00

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Freedom means the control of one's environment. A nation is free, if its corporate actions are determined by its own people and not by persons whom they consider other than themselves or alien from them.

Sometimes, however, it happens that those who come as conquerors remain as friends and brothers and lose all features of alienism. Then their rule becomes **Swaraj**. Thus towards the end of the eleventh century, the English people were conquered by the Normans of France, but they gradually began to fuse together until by the time of Richard II the distinction between the conquerors and the conquered was obliterated, and they became one nation. The same thing happened in India in the case of so many people who came from outside, but after a long sojourn became as much Indian as those who were already domiciled here. They were Aryans Dasyus Pishachas, Hunas. Yueh Chi, Sakas, etc., who by amalgamating their cultures—which mainly include modes of dining and wiving—became one and the same people. the same thing however, did not happen in the case of our English conquerors, who belonged to a distant island to which they constantly returned and who resolutely

refused to adopt the habits, to wear the garments, to eat the food or to speak the language of the people of this country. They remained obstinately alien, and did nothing towards assimilation with the people. The result was that, with the first breath of national consciousness, Indian threw them out, not because there was anything wrong with them as people or as individuals, but because they were not ours.

The Muslims had a better chance of amalgamating themselves with us. They had made a permanent domicile in India, and adopted to a great extent the habits and manners of the people living here. Their culture fructified best by its contact with the indigenous culture and produced those monuments of art and literature which are some of the wonders of the world. But their Semitism in belief (with a few welcome modifications) and the practice of caste and untouchability among Hindus did not allow them to feel perfectly at home with their neighbours. The modern revivalism among them, with its definitive and missionary tendencies, has torn up the solder set by the great Mughals and undone the work of centuries. The political divisions have further widened the gulf, and now the Muslims have been made to think that Indianism is the worst enemy of Islam.* According to this new ideology they do not belong to the Indian nation but are a separate people, as distinct and alien as

*See p. 7 of **Millat islam and the Menace of Indianism** by Rahmat Ali, the founder of the idea of Pakistan.

the English or the Germans. In their new literature and art they are scrupulously avoiding and synthesis of cultures or any introduction of local colour, or love of the past, through an affectionate mention of ancient rivers or hoary mountains. When naming their homes or hotels they go out of India to find such names as **Manzil-i-Kabuli**, **Kashana-i-Khaqan**, **Hotel Shirazi**, **Hotel Baghdadi**, **Hotel Khayam**, etc.

This is only a dim recollection of what things must have been in the medieval period. At that time the Mohammedans being new-comers had a better excuse to be exclusive and alien in their sympathies. But they had no excuse to impose their ways of living on others in the matter of worldly comforts their civilization was superior to ours, and therefore it was right for us to imitate them in certain things, such as the use of fruit like apples and apricots, of sharbat with a lump of ice put into it, of rugs and curtains to decorate our rooms of cups and saucers, of gardens and libraries and scores of other thing that make life graceful and happy. They were not imposed but were adopted voluntarily by sheer intercourse. But there were other things which were forced upon the people or were taken up by them out of craven fear or weakneed cajolery. This was a denationalising process, and the patriotic elements in the nation-composed chiefly of Sikhs in those days protested vehemently against it, Guru Nanak declared in a general way that—

“All people are under one Sovereign,
Who hold them responsible for their actions,
Only fools and idiots try to rule over others.”

(Rag Basant)

The whole movement sponsored by Guru Nanak was for ensuring that no community should dominate any other community in any sphere of life. His first slogan as a teacher of men was : "There is no Hindu, no Muslim." All were simply men, God's own men. with full human rights to develop the humanity in them to its divinest possibilities." and yet, as he looked round he regretted to see what man had made of man. In his **Asa-di-Var** he complained that the people were so cowed down in spirit that they would pay homage to whosoever came to rule over them. "The blind subjects, out of ignorance, offer their loyalty to the alien rulers like dead men. While they carry on their peculiar worship at home, they outwardly mimick the manners of the ruling class, reading their books and wearing their fashions in order to be acceptable to them." "In every home they call themselves by foreign names, like **Mian**, and speak the language not their own." (**Basant**).

In the matter of food they showed the same slavish mentality. The Mohammedans ate meat dressed in the manner called **halal**, In which the animal was killed slowly with a text read from the Quran. This was their right to do. But they tried to impose the same manner on others who were not Muslims. They would insist that if a Hindu wanted to eat meat he should obtain it from a Mohammedan butcher, or get an animal killed by the hand of a Mohammedan. This was pure tyranny. but the Hindus submitted to it, inspite, of the Rajput tradition of **Jhatka**, by which the animal was killed with one stroke, involving a speedier and less torturing

method of killing. Guru Nanak, in his **Asa-di-Var**, refers to this inconsistency of Hindus who held the Muslims (wrongly of course) to be untouchables and yet they had no scruples in eating meat prepared by them with a Muslim formula. If they wanted to eat flesh why should they submit to Muslim domination? Why should they not prepare meat themselves? That would be more self-respecting and at the same time more humane.

The Guru introduced this idea of **Jhatka** among his followers, which being incorporated later on by Guru Gobind Singh among the baptismal vows prescribed by him is still insisted on by Sikhs as a mark of their liberty. It stands for the freedom of food, which was maintained as long as Sikhs were politically free. But with the coming of the British it was suspended for us, and we are still waiting for the day when we should be again free in the matter of food. Why should not Mohammedans allow Hindus and Sikhs to follow their own method of killing animals? They do not want to restrict the right of Mohammedans to practise **halal**. They only want to have the right of **Jhatka**, which is followed by all nations in their own countries. It is only the non-Muslims in India who were being obliged to follow the will of the Muslim minority. But why they should still do it in Bombay, Poona and elsewhere in emancipated India passes our understanding.

II

The Second Freedom, for which the Sikhs led the way, was the Liberty of Thought and Expression. Guru Arjan had prepared an intercommunal book, the Holy Granth in which besides giving an honoured place to Hindu and Muslim compositions, he had freely criticised the ideas and beliefs of Hindus and Muslims. For this, although ostensibly for offering prayer for Prince Khusrau, he was hauled up before Emperor Jahangir, and without being tried or questioned was tortured to death. The Emperor himself admits in his **Tuzuk** that he had already formed a prejudice against him and his movement. He says :

"So many of the simple minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by his ways and teachings. He was noised about as a religious and worldly leader. They called him **Guru**, and from all directions shoals of fools would come to him and express great devotion to him. This busy traffic had been carried on for three or four generations. For years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either, I should put an end to this false traffic, or he should be brought into the fold of Islam,

This clearly shows that the Guru suffered for his opinions. The Sikh character was intensified by this suffering and after this we hear the Sikhs taking up the cause of freedom in other spheres. Had not their martyred Guru told them : "The order of the Merciful Lord has gone forth that henceforth no one shall molest another" (**Sri Rag**). And the Sikhs had been sufficiently prepared to know what this order meant for them.

III

The third freedom, for which the Sixth Guru fought and the Ninth Guru suffered, was in the sphere of Missionary work. Muslims, were free to make conversions among all Indians, and those who carried on this work, or were converted, received encouragement of all sorts from the government. The result was that a large number of people specially in the beautiful valley of Kashmir, had gone over to Islam. Guru Hargobind made a tour up to Gorakhmata in the Kumaon Hills and up to Srinagar in the North, and reclaimed many people who had changed their faith. His efforts were found most successful in Kashmir, where thousands of Mohammedan converts were brought back to the fold of sikhism. The case which created the greatest sensation was that of Bibi Kaulan, who was the daughter of a Qazi of Lahore and had taken refuge in Sikhism. The Kaulsar tank, near the Golden Temple is a monument erected in her honour. Jahangir had taken no stronger measures than interning the Guru in Gwalior or keeping him under personal surveillance, but Shah Jahan was of a sterner stuff. He passed orders prohibiting any attempt at converting Mohammedans, and severely punished those who were converted. (See Sri Ram Sharma's **Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors**, P. 107). This brought

him into conflict with the Sikhs, who were determined to exert their right of making conversions and were particularly annoyed at the desecration of their famous Baoli of Lahore, which was filled up and a mosque erected on the site of the free kitchen attached to it. A war followed, in which the Sikhs were successful but they did not acquire even an inch of territory as a result of their victories. Short-sighted historians mention the possession of a hawk or a horse as the immediate cause of the war, but they forget that something far greater was involved in the dispute. A new heroism was rising the land, of which the object, then dimly seen was to create a will to resist the mighty power of the foreign aggressors, called Toorks.

Guru Tegh Bahadur had to suffer for the same right. His only fault was that he had taken up the cause of the Hindus of Kashmir who were being converted in thousands to Islam. The Guru had taken up the challenge, and was taking Muslims into his fold. One such convert was a prominent leader named Saifud Din of Saifabad in Patiala, and another was a Pathan of Garhi near Samana. These and other cases created a stir in the country and the Guru had to pay for it with his life.

IV

The Fourth Freedom was in the domain of Politics and was founded by Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa. The Guru was convinced after bitter experience that it was not enough to deliver blows to the enemy in the battle field, as was done in the days of Guru Hargobind. Political power must be seized, and a parallel government established, which should draw all Patriotic elements to words it. It is wrong to say that the struggle was between Sikhs and Muslims. Guru Gobind Singh's armies had a considerable number of Muslims and Hindus among them, and the Mughal forces had many Hindu Rajas as co-workers and allies. on one side were arrayed all the lovers of liberty, and on the other the vested interests of the foreigner along with a great many quislings whose short-sighted policy of obsourantism in religion would not allow them to side with the saviour of their nation. Guru Gobind Singh had not only many friends among Mohammedans, such as Qazi Pir Mohammed and Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan, who saved his life at very critical moments, but had also allies like Pir Budhu Shah of Sadhaura who sent 500 Pathans to enlist in his army and whose sons died fighting for the cause of the Guru. Rai Kalha of jat pura and Said Beg and Maimu Khan, two generals, were among those patriotic Mohammedans who offered their resources unreservedly to the Guru. There

were similar co-workers among Hindus whose support was as unstinted as that of Sikhs or Mohammedans. In fact, the Sikh cause was the country's cause, and all those who did not favour any one community's domination over others were working together under the leadership of Sikhs.

After Guru Gobind Singh things were made too hot for others, and the whole work of liberation had to be carried on by Sikhs alone. And what a terrible work it was! After a Prolonged struggle, in which the Punjab was made over by the incompetent rulers of Delhi to the King of Kabul, the Sikhs fought their way to the throne of Lahore and wrested the country from the clutches of Afghans. If therefore the Panjab is still a part of India, it is due to the sacrifices of the Sikhs. But for them this province would have been a part of Central Asia or of Afghanistan, and its inhabitants would have been totally converted to Islam.

The Sikh rule was established in the Panjab in 1756, and thus the prophecy that 'the Khalsa shall rule' (Raj Karega Khalsa) came to be fulfilled. But you may ask why did the Sikhs take it upon themselves to rule, when they had started with the idea that no community should dominate any other community? The reply is, that at that time there was no other living Indian community. The Hindus of the Panjab were politically dead, and the Muslims were still foreigners, looking upon themselves as an army of occupation billeted upon India as **darul harb**. In those circumstances, the Sikhs were the only nationals of the Punjab, and their rule meant the rule of the effective part of Panjabis.

As soon as the foreign rule was ousted by a confederacy of Sikhs, called Misals, there came a truly national hero; in the person of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who tried to rule not as a Sikhs monarch but as a common panjabi ruler. For this purpose he abolished the Misal system of government which was purely Sikh, and substituted a council composed of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. He wanted to make Hindus and Muslims feel that they were as much the people of this land as Sikhs, and had the same right to be consulted as the people of his own community. He did not want that any community should rule over any other community. He therefore, abolished the rule of the Akal Takhat, so far as political affairs were concerned, and began to take the advice of ministers drawn from the ranks of all the communities. He was thus the founder of the first secular state in India. The Gurmatta of the Akal Takhat had no place in such a secular scheme. It would have put a great strain on the loyalty of his Hindu and Muslim subjects, if he had still tried to rule over them by the religious edicts issued from the Mecca of the Sikhs.

He created trust in his administration by trusting people of all communities. When he took Lahore in 1799 from Sikh Sardars, he gave it to Imam Bakhsh Kotwal to administer it for him. His most trusted Vizir was Faqir Azizud Din. He would not take his food unless it was first tested and certified to be wholesome by his Muslim Vizir. Faqir Nurud Din was the governor of his capital, and was so much honoured that he had

permission to remonstrate even with the Maharaja, if the latter were found doing any act of injustice. These orders were given in writing and are preserved by the descendents of the governor. Generals like Mohkam Chand and Diwan Chand, Governors like Sawan Mal and Ventura, and financiers like Bhawani Das and Ganga Ram were trusted and honoured as much as Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa and S. Amar Singh Majithia. If he made great gifts to the Sikh Gurdwaras, he was no less generous in endowing the Hindu and Muslim places of worship with jagirs and donations.

In the present age also the aim of the Sikhs has been not to allow any community to have dominion over other communities. If they wished to get rid of the British rule, they are equally determined not to allow the substitution of a Hindu or a Muslim rule. They worked with the Indian National Congress believing that its policy was truly national and would not permit placation of any one community at the expense of another. Seeing that the Congress was going to yield before the communal demand of the Muslim League, the Sikhs took up an independent attitude not to oppose nationalism, but to see that communalism does not succeed, at least at the expense of Sikhs. Their view is that no community in the Centre or in the Provinces should be in a position to dominate over other communities. With this view they began their history, and for this view they have been fighting all along. It is to reverse, nay, to undo all their history to expect them to acquiesce in any arrangements which place one community over another.